

RE: Confirming you have connected with experts

Staudt, Richard <restaudt@seattleschools.org>

Thu 1/31/2019 2:04 PM

To: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>

Cc: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>; Campbell, Carri J <cjcampbell@seattleschools.org>; Superintendent <superintendent@seattleschools.org>; Joy Resmovits <jresmovits@seattletimes.com>; Ray Rivera <rrivera@seattletimes.com>

Neal,

We have been talking about two sink/bubbler combinations at Green Lake, so I am not sure what you are looking for when you ask about “the fountain”. If you really meant to ask about those same two fixtures again and not a singular one that we haven’t previously discussed, the answer is different for each. The fixture in room 115, pod A, would have had its bubbler part disabled since at least 2008. The one in room 101, pod C, had passed testing prior to the round of 8/24/17. As I mentioned, the request to disable it goes out as soon as the results are back and the failure is identified. It would take a couple of days to make that happen, perhaps a few more during the busy start of school time, so I believe the answer would be early to mid-September 2017.

Again, we agree with your assessment that our notations on these “bubbler disabled, now just a sink, sign posted not to drink water from the sink” situations can be improved. We will be deciding on a clearer caption for those within the next couple of days and Shelly will proceed to update those. She is not trying to hide anything, since we have far and away the strongest drinking water quality program in the state, but simply trying to ensure that nobody else winds up being confused at all.

Richard

From: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>

Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2019 1:11 PM

To: Staudt, Richard <restaudt@seattleschools.org>

Cc: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>; Campbell, Carri J <cjcampbell@seattleschools.org>; Superintendent <superintendent@seattleschools.org>; Joy Resmovits <jresmovits@seattletimes.com>; Ray Rivera <rrivera@seattletimes.com>

Subject: RE: Confirming you have connected with experts

Thanks for the clarity, Richard. We also received your update on Memorial Stadium.

One last question: Do you know when exactly the fountain at Green Lake was disabled?

-Neal Morton

Reporter | [Education Lab](#)
The Seattle Times

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From: Staudt, Richard [<mailto:restaudt@seattleschools.org>]

Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2019 11:32 AM

To: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>

Cc: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>; Campbell, Carri J <cjcampbell@seattleschools.org>; Superintendent <superintendent@seattleschools.org>; Joy Resmovits <jresmovits@seattletimes.com>; Ray Rivera <rrivera@seattletimes.com>

Subject: RE: Confirming you have connected with experts

Hi Neal,

We appreciate your bringing to our attention those items that are confusing to you. In our interview with you, you suggested that it would be clearer for anyone viewing our pages if every table had a caption indicating which elements was being reported on. I am not sure why some schools had that and others did not. We agreed that consistent captions would reduce the risk of any confusion so we implemented that change. I am not sure that Shelly has gotten to every table on every page but she does continually update the pages as new results come in and is in that site nearly daily.

This morning, after your bringing to my attention overnight the potential confusion that could result when a person saw the Sink/Bubbler combinations where the bubbler was disabled and a sign posted above what is now just a handwashing sink, I asked her to suggest a clearer notation to be entered in the tables for those fixtures. Please don’t be surprised when there is yet another improvement made to various tables based on your recommendations.

In answer to your questions about specific fixtures at Green Lake, our procedure (as we have told you repeatedly) calls for any drinking water source to be disabled as soon as test results show that it does not meet our 10ppb standard. That clearly is not at the very moment it is sampled, since it takes a few days for results to come back from the certified lab. It is within a few days. Such drinking water sources will not be put back into service until they have been remediated, retested, and met our standards. If there is no other source of good drinking water in close proximity, we will supply bottled water during that time.

As I mentioned, Shelly is continually updating the web pages as new results come in. She does not work by “work order” so I don’t have any such document to share with you. Perhaps our district webmaster would be able to help you to review the “versioning” of that page, but there will be dozens or hundreds of updates to parse through.

Shelly confirmed that the two Green Lake fixtures you are looking at are ones in the “disabled bubbler, now just a sink, sign posted reminding users not to drink from the sink” category, which we have agreed appear confusing when we have indicated that just as “PS”. She was trying to make the actual status more clear. Neither DIS nor PS are complete descriptions, but neither are entirely inaccurate either. We need to decide what code will make most sense to our stakeholders. I have asked her to not make any more changes to fixtures in that category until we determine what notation would be most clear. You can anticipate a series of updates to this category coming soon, not to hide anything but to reduce the potential for confusion. It will not mean that the status of the fixtures themselves has changed at all.

With respect to "remediation" at Green Lake, the only work I see in the work management system in the past year is the regular replacement of filters at the bubblers ("drinking fountains") and a repair of the fixture in room B7 required because it was leaking. Or were you asking about the remediation work that was done across the district back in the 2004-2007 timeframe?

Richard

From: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2019 10:41 AM
To: Staudt, Richard <restaudt@seattleschools.org>
Cc: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>; Campbell, Carri J <cjcampbell@seattleschools.org>; Superintendent <superintendent@seattleschools.org>; Joy Resmovits <jresmovits@seattletimes.com>; Ray Rivera <rrivera@seattletimes.com>
Subject: RE: Confirming you have connected with experts

Good morning Richard,

Please extend my thanks to Shelley for helping check on those additional failures.

Could you also please address some recent changes I've noticed in the test results pages? When we first met two weeks ago, I brought to your attention that multiple pages (Green Lake and Boren, for example) included no label for the tables to indicate what heavy metal the tests were for. Now it looks like Boren, Green Lake and other school pages have been updated to include such a label.

I'm also curious about the Green Lake results. As recently as last week, I saw no indication of a disabled fixture at Green Lake. Now, the test results page for that school includes two. It also includes a new batch of test results posted for late 2017. A look at Rachel's data, my own notes and spreadsheet and a cached version of the website show the Green Lake page did not include those 2017 results and two disabled fixtures until recently.

Do the changes mean that the fixture was disabled when it was tested? Or did the district disable it more recently, since we started talking? Please let me know, and please also share a full work order of changes made this month to any test result page for individual schools, as well as any paperwork you have on the lead remediation that took place at Green Lake and Boren.

Thanks for the help,

-Neal Morton

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From: Staudt, Richard [<mailto:restaudt@seattleschools.org>]
Sent: Thursday, January 31, 2019 10:19 AM
To: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Cc: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>
Subject: RE: Confirming you have connected with experts

Neal,

Shelly did not immediately know what the situation is with the bubbler in the shop building at Ingraham. She will check on that today or tomorrow and take appropriate action if it is out of compliance with our procedures.

Our leasing coordinator is not in the office this morning so it will be this afternoon before I can confirm whether locker room #3 at Memorial Stadium is in the space controlled by the Reign or in our space. We will also take any action required to bring it into compliance.

The sink/bubbler combinations, as I thought, have their bubbler component disabled when the fixture fails and then have the "don't drink the sink water" sign posted above what is now strictly a classroom sink. On this one point, I can understand why the reports might have confused you. We will review how we list these going forward so as to reduce any chance of future confusion.

If we assume that the two fixtures (Memorial and Ingraham) are out of compliance, then I do stand corrected. It is not 100% of drinking water sources that meet our standard but only 99.92%. Still a far cry from Rachel's vastly misguided assumption that 53% of our schools had at least one drinking water source that didn't meet our 10ppb standard. I hope you will be using accurate data rather than continuing to propagate information you know to be false, even though the latter would be much more sensational.

Obviously, the route you choose at this point is up to you and your own moral compass. Do you do the right thing or do you succumb to pressure from your editors who are trying to sell papers?

Richard

From: Staudt, Richard
Sent: Wednesday, January 30, 2019 11:55 PM
To: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Cc: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>
Subject: Re: Confirming you have connected with experts

Neal,

I will again need to check with Shelly to see what is going on with what is indicated as a bubbler ("fountain" to use your term) in the shop building at Ingraham. It is again an unusual setting but I may have to eat crow on this one based on what I am seeing in the tables tonight.

On the others, please let me confirm with her as well but I would be relatively confident in asserting that those are now just sinks - when we run into a sink/bubbler combination (S/B or B/S in the tables) and the fixture doesn't pass, we disable the bubbler part of it and post a "don't drink from the sink" sign. I am sorry but I don't expect her to be answering her emails at 11:55 at night - I think I must be the only one crazy enough to be doing that!

Richard

From: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 30, 2019 10:51 PM
To: Staudt, Richard
Cc: Robinson, Tim
Subject: Re: Confirming you have connected with experts

Thank you for checking on those Green Lake fixtures, Richard. Could you also please check the following failures:

- A fountain at Ingraham High that tested at 16 ppb with a sign posted
- A fountain at Graham Hill that tested at 12 ppb with a sign posted
- Two fountains at South Shore that tested at 12 ppb with a sign posted
- A fountain at Alki that tested at 11 ppb with a sign posted

From: Staudt, Richard <restaudt@seattleschools.org>
Sent: Wednesday, January 30, 2019 10:39 PM
To: Neal Morton
Cc: Robinson, Tim
Subject: Re: Confirming you have connected with experts

Neal,

Back at a computer, I see Green Lake further proves our case. Both the sink/bubbler in room 115 (#21, one of the three there) and the one in room 101 (#05, one of four there) were immediately disabled when they failed.

I have to admit that the one you identified at Memorial may prove my "zero" statement wrong, but I would need to check with Shelly before agreeing that we do have one out of the 2000 plus still in operation. It is possible that there is more to the story on that one, given its unique setting. As you know, a good part of the locker room space was controlled by the Reign, our long-term tenants there and they made some of their own improvements. Now that they are soon moving to Tacoma, we will have it all back again and it will be under our normal protocols.

Would you like to share other examples or would you agree now to state accurate data in your article - to this point you've identified one drinking water source, not in a school, that may have been left operational when it shouldn't have been? That is a far less sensational headline than you were angling for with your knowingly false statement to the Broadview Thomson PTSA that they had the greatest number of failed drinking water sources and asking for their reaction.

Gotta sell those papers, though!

Richard

On Jan 30, 2019, at 6:14 PM, Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com> wrote:

I appreciate the speedy reply, Richard.

Based on the district's data, it is inaccurate to say all of the failed fixtures are sinks. Please take a quick look at the Memorial Stadium results. A drinking fountain in the locker room tested above the SPS limit. Hopefully the student athletes who compete and train there abide by the posted sign that they not drink from the fountain. Please also look at the results for Boren K-8. A drinking fountain in the girls' locker room also tested above the SPS limit. So too with fountain at Green Lake, where your testing data show a lead reading nearly six times the SPS limit. There are other examples.

As I have explained in previous emails, Rachel's thesis is not the basis for this story. Rather we rely on the analysis she conducted as part of her thesis using the district's own publicly reported data and my checking on the methodology and numbers.

You also seem to have misremembered the question about the failed fixture. I asked whether, after three years of going untested, a fountain with a lead reading above 10 ppb should be a concern for parents, assuming the high amount of level may have appeared six months or even longer before the test.

My editor agreed we can clarify that, although you don't see any room for improvement in the program, you'd be willing to consider the 5 ppb standard.

You have my sincere thanks, Richard, for providing such thorough responses. As I told Tim earlier this week, considering the space constraints in the story, we plan to publish our email exchanges so readers have a full understanding of the district's position.

Thanks,

-Neal Morton

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The Seattle Times

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Twitter: [@nealmorton](#)

From: Staudt, Richard [<mailto:restaudt@seattleschools.org>]
Sent: Wednesday, January 30, 2019 5:37 PM
To: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Cc: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>
Subject: RE: Confirming you have connected with experts

Neal,

It is not the vast majority of them, it is all of them. We do not leave ANY drinking water source in operation if it does not meet our standards. It would be immediately shut down, remediated, retested and not put back into service unless it has passed. In the very few cases where we have not been able to achieve that, the fixture remains shut off and bottled water is supplied if there is not a good drinking water source very close by. I believe there are six such locations across the district at this time.

That is the reason we emphatically reject Rachel's flawed analysis. There are NO (zero!) drinking water sources, and were not at the time of her study, in use in our schools that have failed to meet our standards.

We (Tim and I) have repeated this to you over and over again. How do we get you to understand that? Or rather, since you're clearly an intelligent person, how do we get you to incorporate the truth in your reporting even if it makes your story less sensational?

By the way, you did tell Tim you were not going to cite Rachel's study due to the number of problems with it, but rather planning to use your own analysis of our data. Now you are saying you are going to cite it. This is no way to build trust!

Your second quote was my response to your persistently wanting to go down the rabbit hole of "If you only test every three years, how do you know a fixture hasn't turned bad in the intervening time?" In response to your pressing that hypothetical proposition, I gave an answer within that context. We very seldom see a fixture that tested okay suddenly turn bad on a subsequent test, but it does happen on rare occasions. If that were the case and we assumed that it had "gone bad" at some point in the intervening time, then yes, if you make that assumption, I said, "Maybe the last six months ..." Your quote is accurate, but I hope you are including the context that you were asking specifically about the case of a fixture that tested good and later failed. We could provide you with data on the number of such occurrences, but I would guess that it is probably fewer than 20 out of 2600-odd drinking water sources in any three year cycle, less than 1%.

I hope that you are also including the context of my statement about districts that are moving to 1ppb. As I explained to you, there is no public health agency nor government regulator that has said moving all the way down 1ppb is likely to have a meaningful impact on children's blood lead levels. I explained that Simoni Triantafyllidou, whose work the AAP relied on to pick that as their recommendation, has not stated that to be an optimal level from a public health perspective and that her subsequent study appears to show that there is a point around 5-7ppb WLL where the model shows any impact to BLL diminishes very rapidly. This is why I have repeatedly encouraged you to speak with her. Clearly, you seem to prefer a statement that will sound sensational if reported out of context to a nuanced scientific answer.

Did you also include my statement that we'd be willing to look at the pros and cons of moving to a 5ppb district standard, involving Public Health to evaluate the potential benefits of that? I am not a scientist nor a public health official and can't make such determinations without their input. As I repeatedly said to you, Simoni's work seems to indicate that a 5ppb level might possibly show some benefit over the 10ppb we use and over the 15ppb EPA action level. The vast majority of our drinking water sources already meet the 5ppb threshold (and very many meet the 1ppb threshold), so I don't know what formalizing that as our district standard might cost.

I guess I owe you thanks for at least including one statement that is based in science, that of Simoni's study on post-remediation risks. Given your propensity to twist and torture every other piece of information to try to cause unjustified alarm in your readers, it is surprising to me that you'd take that step and potentially knock down some of the flames you have worked so hard to fan.

Richard

From: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 30, 2019 4:39 PM
To: Staudt, Richard <restaudt@seattleschools.org>
Subject: RE: Confirming you have connected with experts

Hi Richard,

Thanks for your patience. Below you will find a list of your direct quotes and what I paraphrased, both with some context of what precedes or follows each in the story. Please understand that I agree to share these quotes, not for approval or modification, but to ensure there are no errors.

-Early on, I cite "district officials" (both you and Tim, informally) saying the high lead reading on the failed fixtures don't pose a danger to students as the vast majority of them are classroom sinks, not drinking fountains.

-After citing the data in Rachel's analysis and individual school results, I mention you as the administrator who oversees the district's water quality program (not sure how many readers would know what a risk management department is). I note you reject Rachel's analysis and that you said the overall rate of failures shouldn't concern parents or one failed fixture as their school. "Maybe the last six months it was above 10 (parts per billion) but now we've identified it and shut it off and replaced that fixture. If that's the one source that your student drinks from all the time, perhaps they've been exposed."

-I mention that you described the Berkeley and San Diego limits of 1 parts per billion as "strictly public relations."

-I mention that you said the testing and remediation protocols have not changed since the Board's adoption in 2004.

-I mention that you said multiple parents have found the test results pages accessible, and note the district recently added language to its site stating sinks are not considered drinking water sources.

-I mention the district currently spends about \$65,000 on its program each year.

-I quote you as saying there's no need to invest additional money on an automatic flushing device (like the one I saw in Chicago): "I don't see that there's a need for a change. We have limited resources." Directly after, I cite the 2014 study that found Seattle's remediation program practically eliminated water lead levels as a health threat.

-Neal Morton

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From: Staudt, Richard [<mailto:restaudt@seattleschools.org>]
Sent: Wednesday, January 30, 2019 1:55 PM
To: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Cc: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>
Subject: RE: Confirming you have connected with experts

I don't have an electronic copy. I will see if Shelly might have, but it goes back to before her time here.

Forgive me, but I would really like to respond to your proposed quotes in writing. I generally assume that people do their best to be trustworthy. Somehow, though, you've given me the very strong impression that you don't hesitate to be selective with what parts of the truth you choose to tell. In your email to Broadview PTSA, you demonstrated that you even will just play fast and loose with it at times, for reasons I simply cannot understand.

Richard

From: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 30, 2019 1:42 PM
To: Staudt, Richard <restaudt@seattleschools.org>
Cc: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>
Subject: RE: Confirming you have connected with experts

Is the plan available in electronic form? Don't mind stopping by the office at some point – perhaps tomorrow – to grab a print copy but would be easier as a PDF or any other email attachment.

I would prefer to discuss the quotes over the phone, if only to hear your feedback in real time. I'm about to leave for a meeting in Pioneer Square but should be back at my desk about 3:30/4 p.m. Available any time after that for a call.

Thanks,

-Neal Morton

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From: Staudt, Richard [<mailto:restaudt@seattleschools.org>]
Sent: Wednesday, January 30, 2019 1:05 PM
To: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Cc: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>
Subject: RE: Confirming you have connected with experts

Okay, if you would just send me the quotes you plan to use from me, I will be happy to review those.

I have the Remediation Plan binder on my desk. When would you like to come read/copy it? It's a two inch binder.

Richard

From: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Sent: Wednesday, January 30, 2019 12:45 PM
To: Staudt, Richard <restaudt@seattleschools.org>

Cc: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>
Subject: RE: Confirming you have connected with experts

Hi Richard,

I sincerely apologize if I suggested otherwise, but it is not my professional policy – nor is it of the Seattle Times – to share any pre-publication drafts of stories with sources for review. Rather, I offered to go over any quotes I used from you, not for edits but to ensure clarity, and go over any facts and figures. Certainly happy to arrange a phone call with you this afternoon or early tomorrow if you have time.

The story does cite Simoni's study. I had previously done reporting on the state's (unfunded) rules but did not reach out to Derrick as the already lengthy story does not address the state standard. It's probably well worth consideration for a follow up story and I would rely on Derrick for additional information if that happens. (Just so you know, with our Ed Lab features, we often follow up on the initial stories to continue the conversation, host guest essays, poll reader response, etc. So a potential story like this is conceivable.)

I will be sure to ask my editors about the PEHSU fact sheet. But your mention of Sheela and Catherine's work on the 2004 policy reminds me: Do you have a copy of the full drinking water quality remediation plan? It's listed as a resource on your website but there's no link, and I could find no record of it online:

https://www.seattleschools.org/departments/finance/risk_management/environmental_health_issues_and_water_quality/drinking_water_quality_program

-Neal Morton

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From: Staudt, Richard [<mailto:restaudt@seattleschools.org>]
Sent: Wednesday, January 30, 2019 12:15 PM
To: Neal Morton <nmorton@seattletimes.com>
Cc: Robinson, Tim <tirobinson@seattleschools.org>
Subject: Confirming you have connected with experts

Hi Neal,

I am a bit concerned that you have apparently not yet connected with the leading experts in the field of drinking water quality in schools and its potential impact on student health. I have provided you with the names and/or contact information for the following people who are national, state and local experts in the field and have not heard from them that you have reached out to them as yet.

National level

Simoni Triantafyllidou, Office of Research & Development, US EPA – PhD in Environmental Engineering, many (47?) peer-reviewed studies published, primary area of focus is lead in drinking water. A very relevant study is “Reduced risk estimations after remediation of lead (Pb) in drinking water at two US school districts” in Science of the Total Environment 466-476C:1011-1021 (August 2013). I believe she would be happy to share that with you, or you can purchase the full text for \$41 from ResearchGate.

State level

Derrick Dennis, Office of Drinking Water, Environmental Public Health Division, WA State Department of Health derrick.dennis@doh.wa.gov (360) 236-3122, currently leading division doing water quality sampling at school districts that are unable to afford their own programs. Was involved in the creation of the State Board of Health's School Environmental Health and Safety Rules (246-366A WAC) adopted August 12, 2009 that created the first WA State school water sampling requirements. Unfortunately, for schools in districts other than SPS, these rules are still held in abeyance by the legislature due to their perception that there is insufficient funding of school districts and local health jurisdictions to implement them. He has advised that he would be delighted to talk to you about the range of approaches and the sampling results he has seen in school districts across our state.

Local level

Sheela Sathyanarayana, MD, MPH and Catherine Karr, MD. PhD. MS Toxicology, NW Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit. Both are currently active in development and review of lead safety resources, factsheets and presentations as well as being active practice pediatricians working with children who are at risk of environmental exposures. They contributed to the development of SPS' drinking water quality procedures back in 2004 and I believe they would be willing to discuss that work or current recommendations. They have a very useful fact sheet published at the PEHSU website [Lead and Drinking Water](#), which I hope you will be providing as a resource for your readers.

I trust that you will find more meaningful facts when you speak to these experts than are to be found in the master's thesis that you initially indicated would be the “lead” (did you intend the pun?) of your story. If you have not yet made contact with them, your work is far from complete at this point.

Please let me know when we may expect the review draft that you promised to send.

Thanks,

Richard Staudt
Risk Manager
Seattle Public Schools

(206) 252-0710
(206) 743-3031 fax

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